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National Security Questions Termed Issue in Inquiry Into 1973 Testimony by Helms

By ANTHONY HILRO
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 14—Justice Department sources said today that "legitimate questions of national security" were at issue in the grand jury investigation of possible perjury by Richard M. Helms, former Director of Central Intelligence, and that Attorney General Griffin Bell might have to decide whether they were serious enough to prevent the department from seeking an indictment. At the same time, however, the sources noted that any decision had yet been made as to whether Mr. Helms had been indicted. They also said that the department was being exerted to delay any action on the "Presidential level."

Their statements came in response to a copyrighted article in The Wilmington (Del.) Sunday News Journal that quoted Government sources as saying that a "runaway" grand jury wanted to indict Mr. Helms, but that Justice Department prosecutors were under pressure to delay any action until a "Presidential-level" decision had been made.

Reason for Pressure Cited
The newspaper said one reason that such pressure was being applied was that Mr. Helms allegedly had told former colleagues at the Central Intelligence Agency that, if he were indicted, he would say that former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger told him to lie.

Neither Mr. Helms nor his attorney, Edward Bennett Williams, could be

reached for comment today, but several sources at the Justice Department said that no such information had ever been conveyed to them.

Robert Stevenson, a spokesman for the department, said today that he had been assured that no White House pressure had been exerted on the criminal division, which is handling the grand jury investigation, and that the department did not have a "runaway" grand jury on its hands.

At the same time, two other department officials said that a "final decision" on whether to seek an indictment of Mr. Helms had not been reached, but that, even if the department concluded that he had lied under oath, it would have enough evidence to seek an indictment of Mr. Helms, Mr. Bell would probably

considerations before deciding on whether to prosecute the case. The essence of the problem, the officials said, was that, to prosecute a possible charge of perjury, they would have to introduce great amounts of material about the inner workings of the C.I.A. and its covert operations in Chile into the court record.

'Legitimate Security Issue'
"There's nothing sinister about it," a department official said. "It's simply a hard, cold fact that we have a legitimate national security issue that we might have to face."

He and another official both said that in the event the prosecutors felt they had enough evidence to seek an indictment of Mr. Helms, Mr. Bell would probably

have to decide whether any national security implications might outweigh the value of a prosecution for perjury. Mr. Helms was notified by the Justice Department last month that he was a target of a Federal grand jury investigation. The grand jury, which is meeting here, reportedly is hearing allegations that Mr. Helms and officials of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation were involved in a conspiracy to fabricate and coordinate statements they made during a Senate investigation in 1973 into I.T.T. and C.I.A. activities in Chile.

1973 Testimony Recalled
The issue of possibly perjury and obstruction of justice stems from hearings by a Senate subcommittee in April 1973

at which officials from the I.T.T. had been no exchanges of information or other cover. In 1975, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence obtained information from the I.T.T. after obtaining advice from the C.I.A. on how to proceed, in fact funneled \$350,000 in cash to a confidential opponent of President Salvador Allende Gossens of Chile, whose Marxist Government was overthrown by a military junta in September 1973. One Justice Department official today said that Mr. Helms was the only I.T.T. official who also was being investigated—Harold Geneen, president, and John A. McCone, a company director and former head of the C.I.A.—were not likely to be indicted.

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